



US 20220355914A1

(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**
Brackett et al.

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2022/0355914 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Nov. 10, 2022**

(54) **MODULAR RUDDER SYSTEM**

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No. 17/477,932, filed on Sep. 17, 2021, now Pat. No. 11,305,858, which is a continuation of application No. 16/948,128, filed on Sep. 3, 2020, now Pat. No. 11,390,367.

Publication Classification

- (51) **Int. Cl.**
B63H 25/38 (2006.01)
- (52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC *B63H 25/38* (2013.01)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

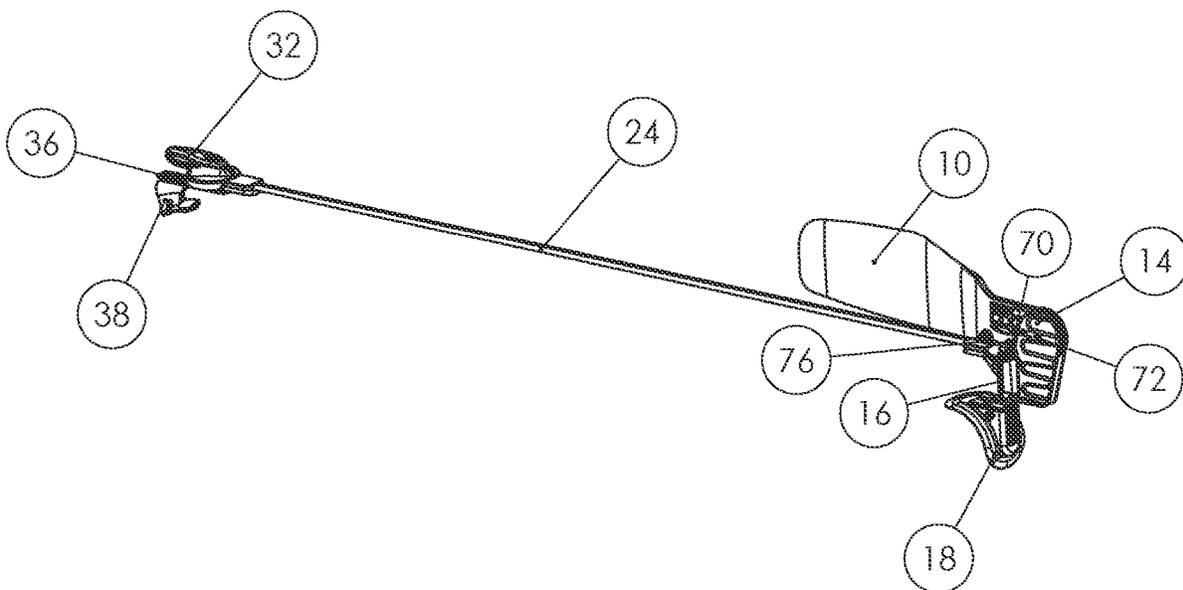
A stand-alone modular removable rudder system for watercraft having a rudder comprising a steering handle coupled to a quick release mechanism adapted to releasably secure said steering handle to said watercraft in proximity to the operator, said system further comprising, a rudder mount adapted to be coupled to the rear of the watercraft by a quick release mechanism adapted to releasably secure said rudder mount to said watercraft, said rudder being carried by a rudder support pivotal about said rudder mount and cables operatively connecting said steering handle to said rudder mount whereby the steering handle can be operated to steer the rudder.

(21) Appl. No.: **17/871,652**

(22) Filed: **Jul. 22, 2022**

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 17/719,296, filed on Apr. 12, 2022, which is a continuation of application



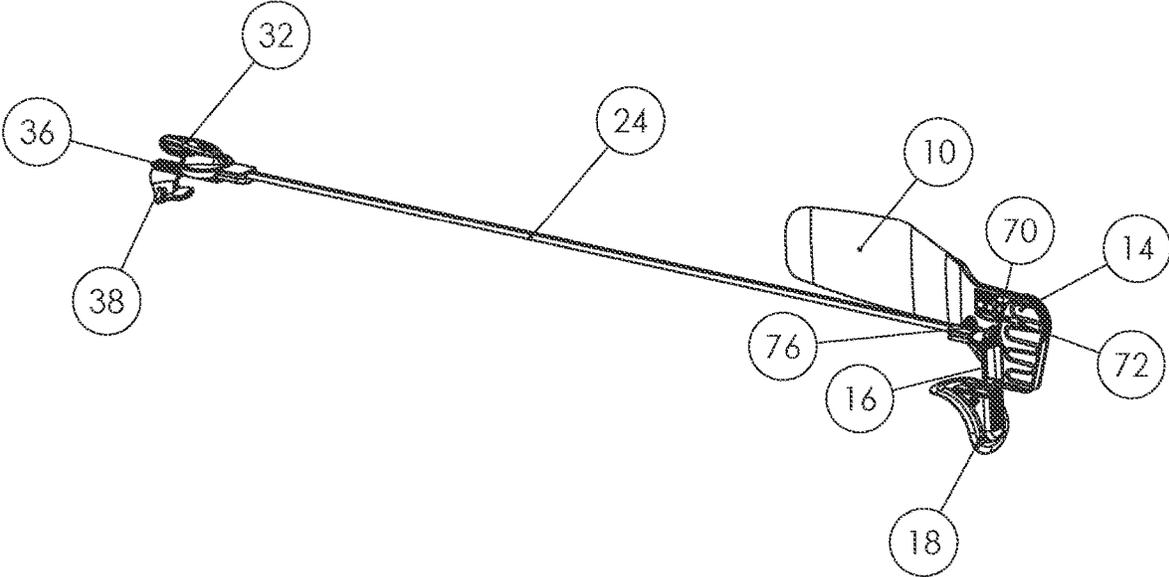


Figure 1

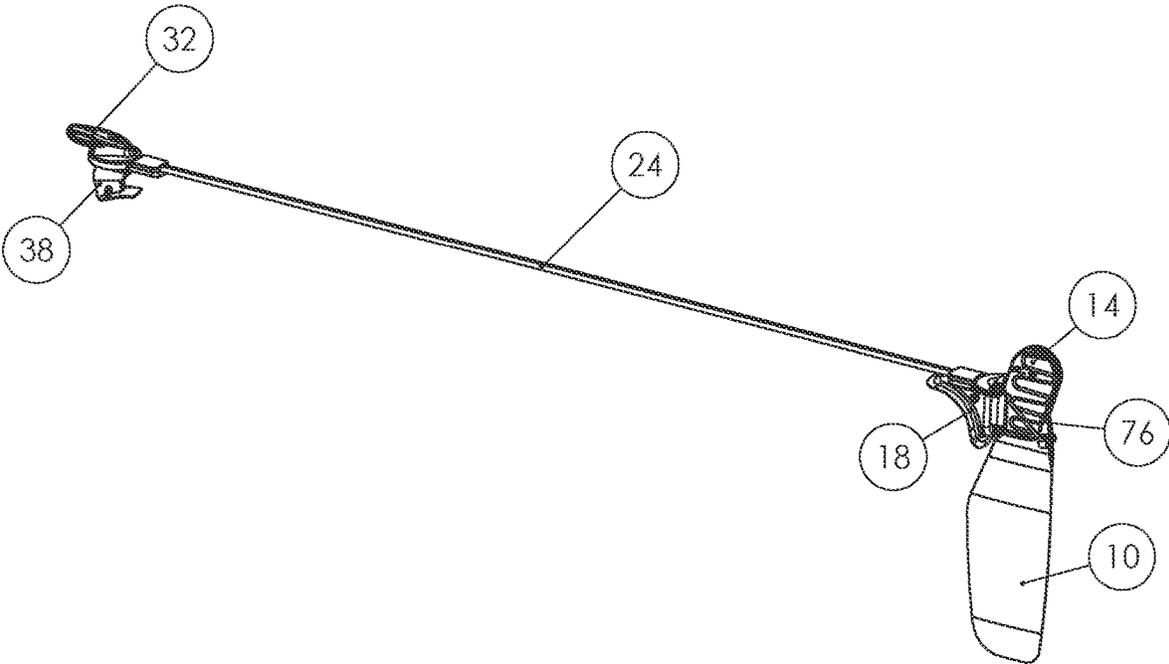


Figure 2

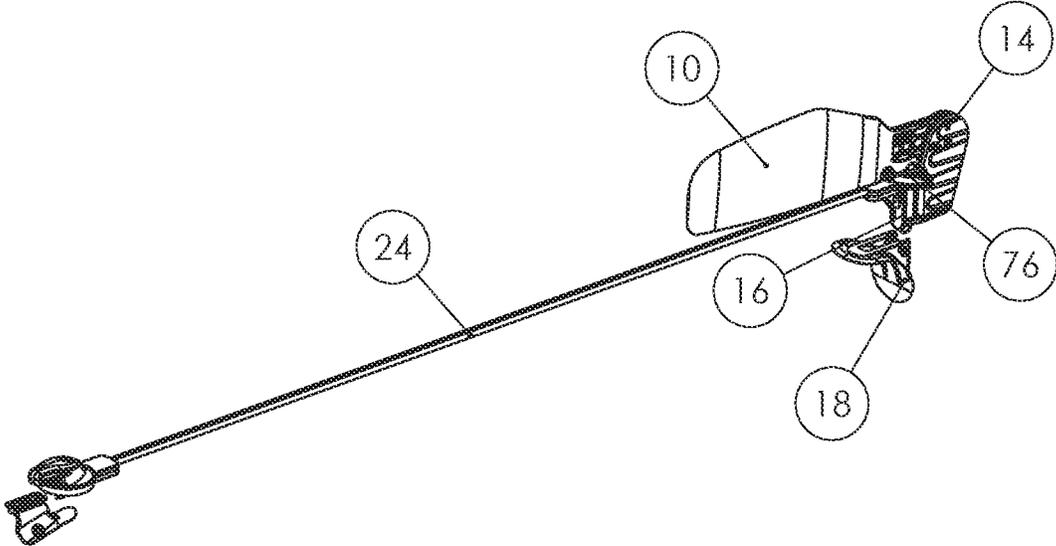


Figure 3

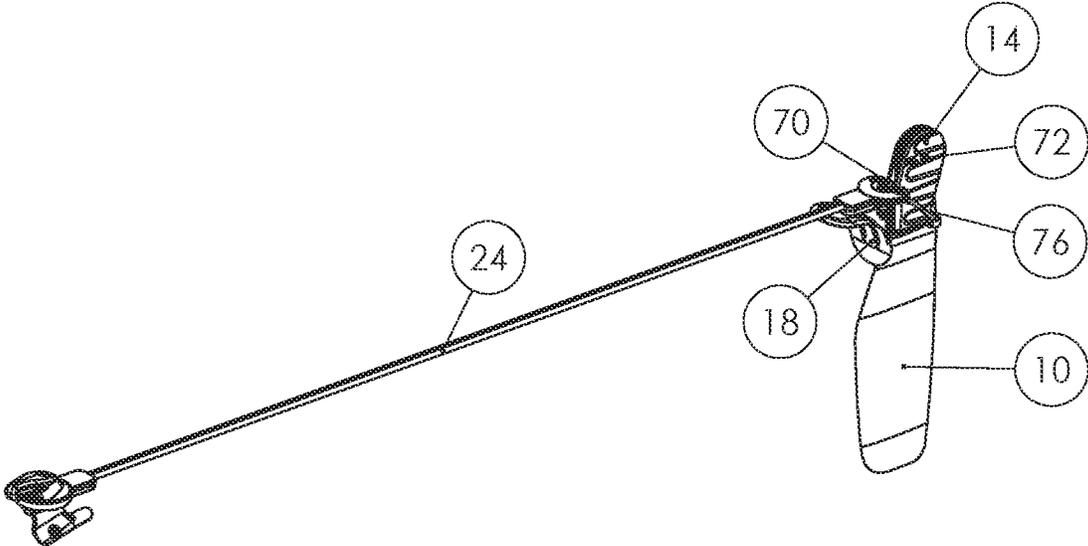


Figure 4

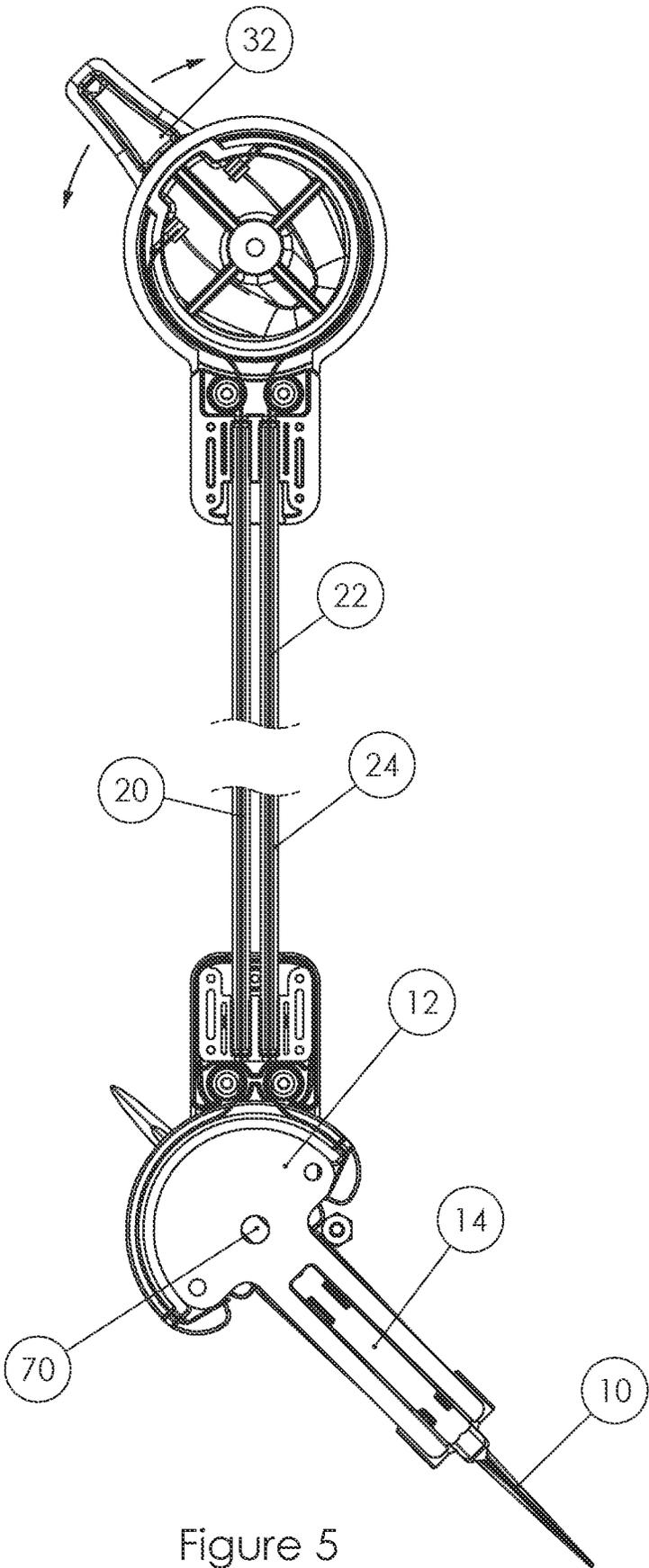


Figure 5

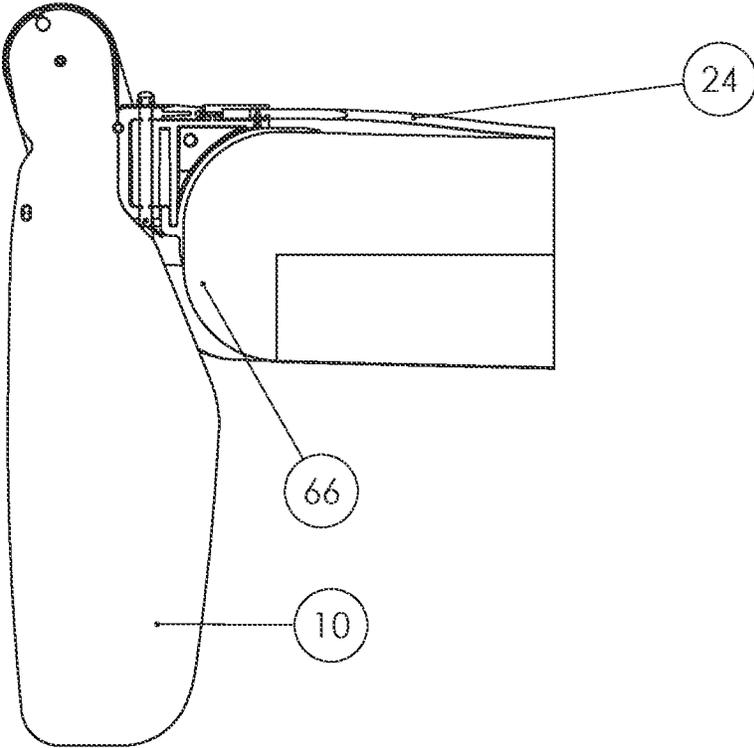


Figure 6

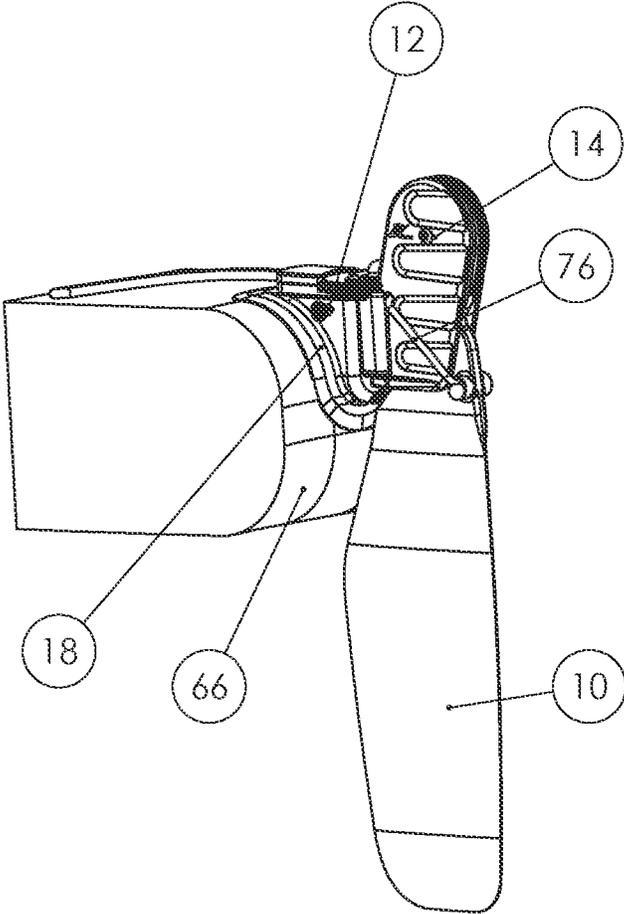


Figure 6A

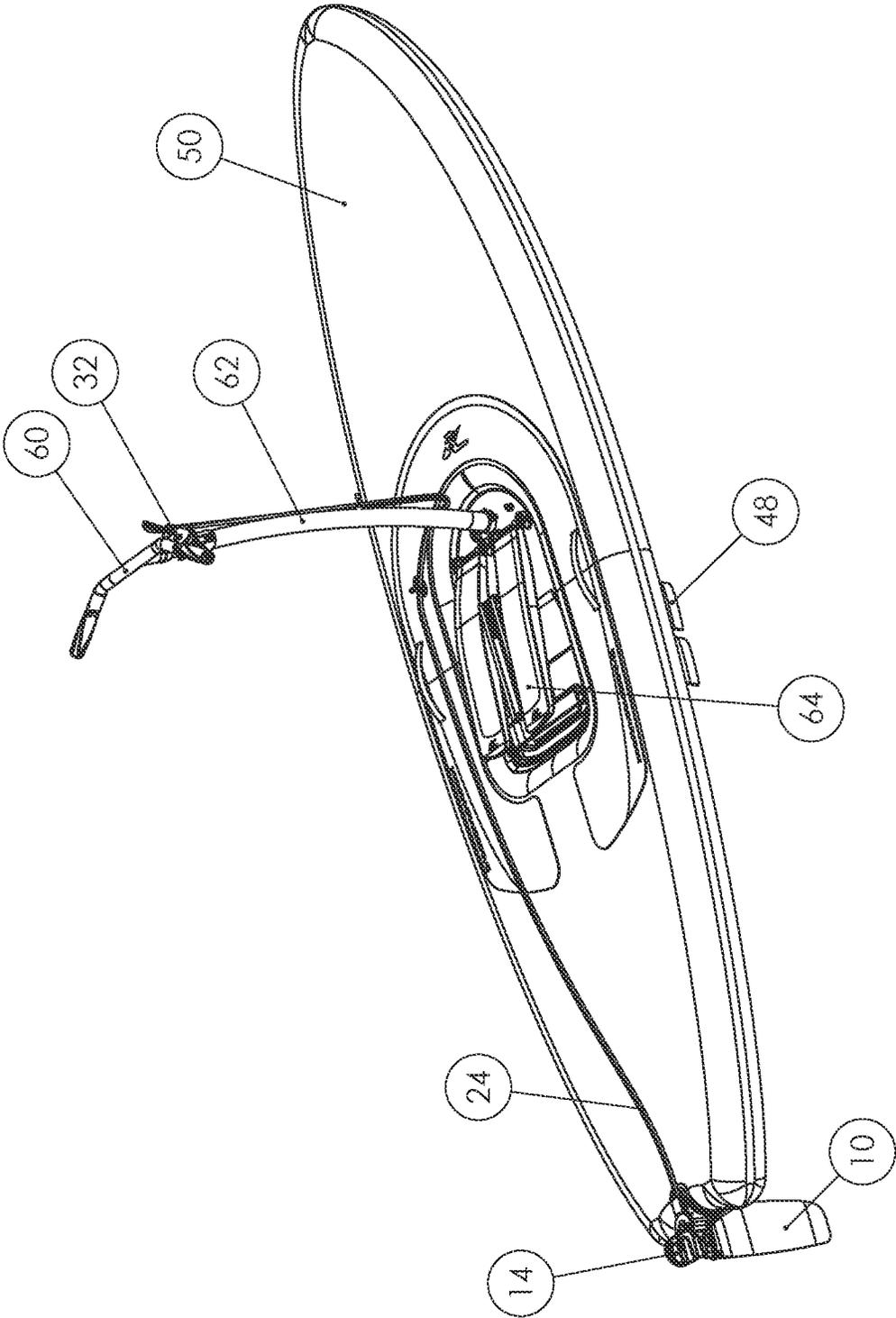


Figure 8

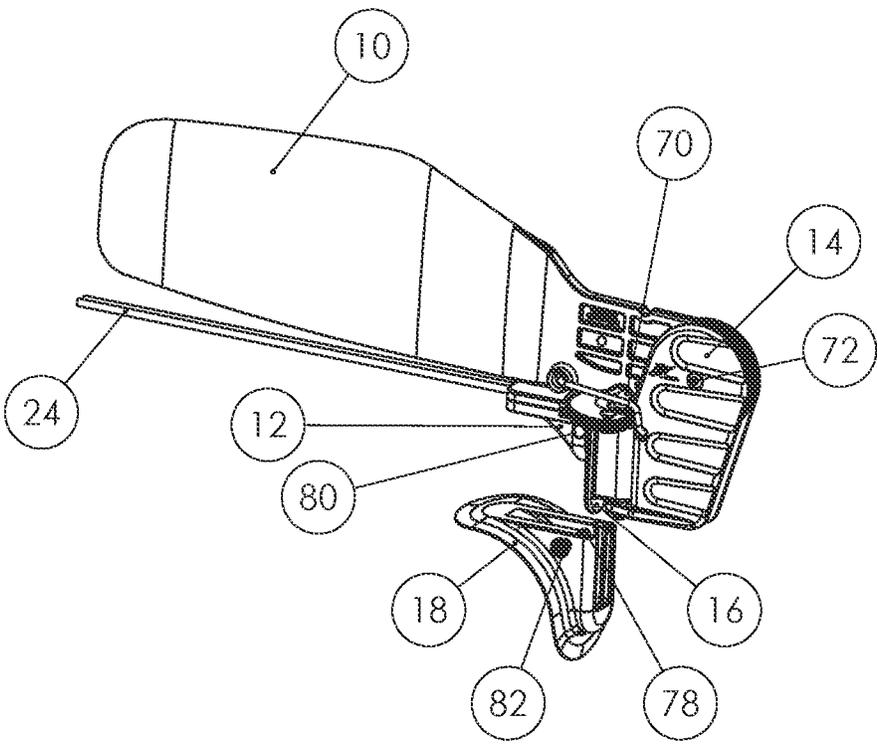


Figure 9

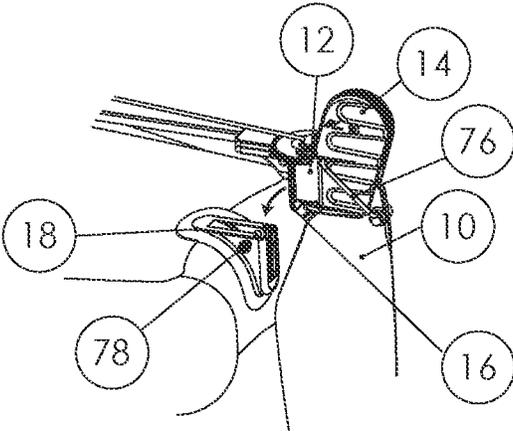


Figure 10 A

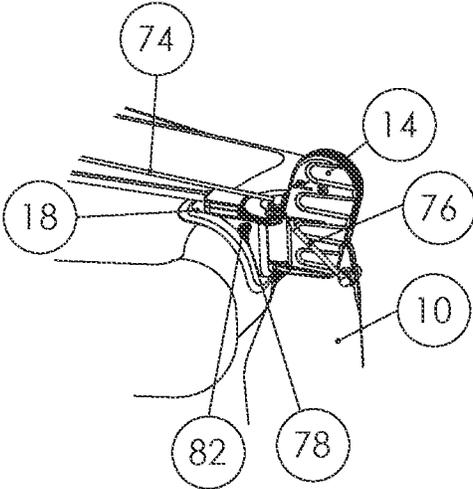


Figure 10 B

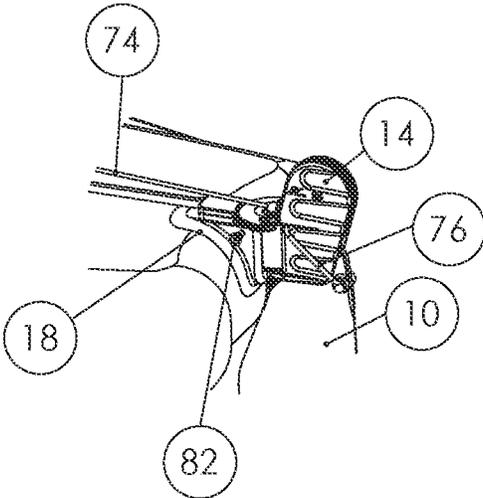


Figure 10 C

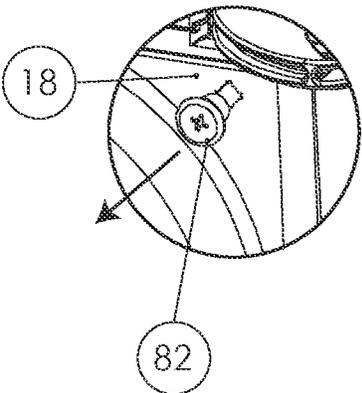


Figure 10 D

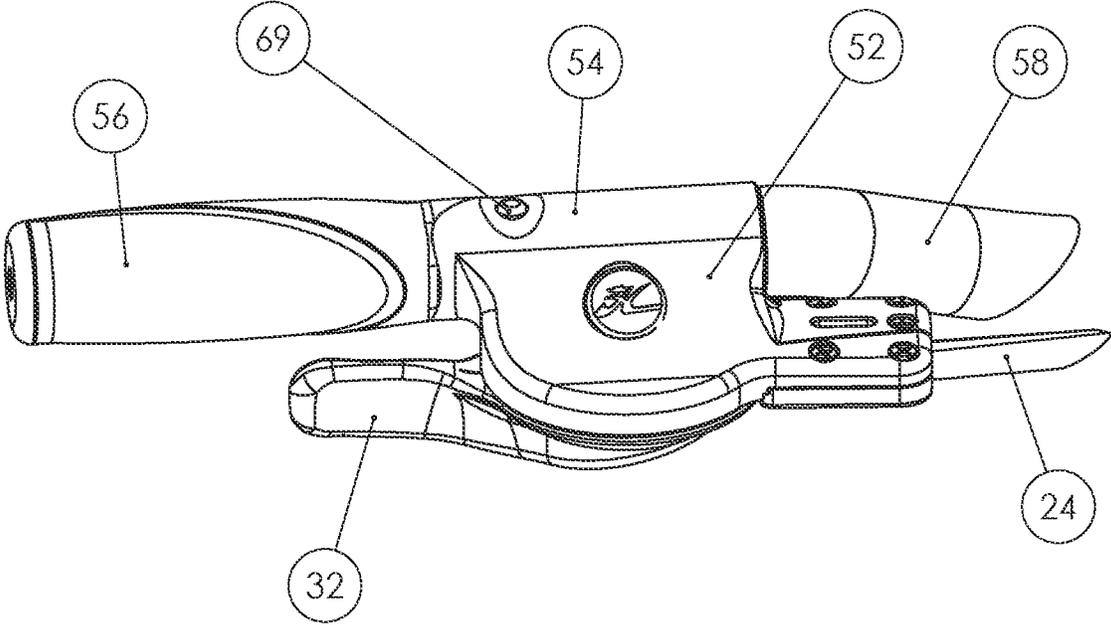


Figure 11

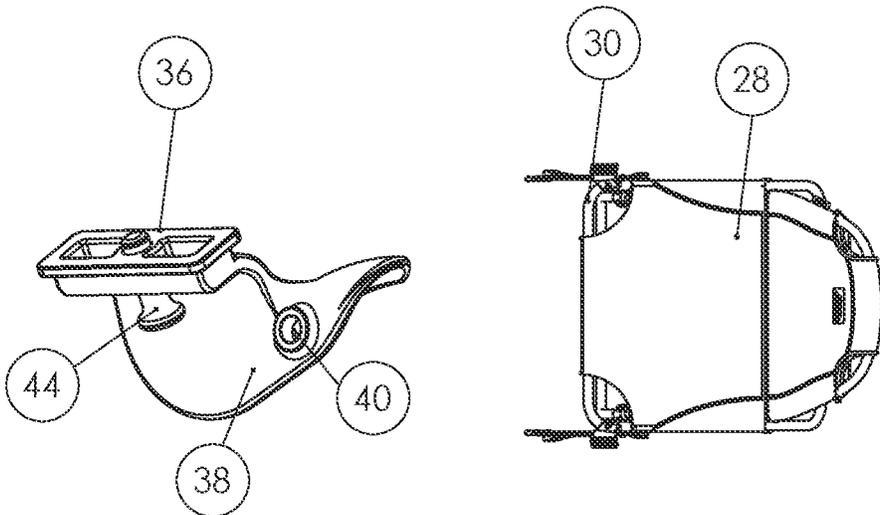


Figure 12 A

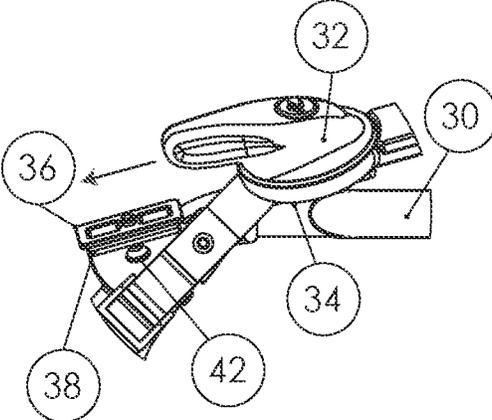


Figure 12 B

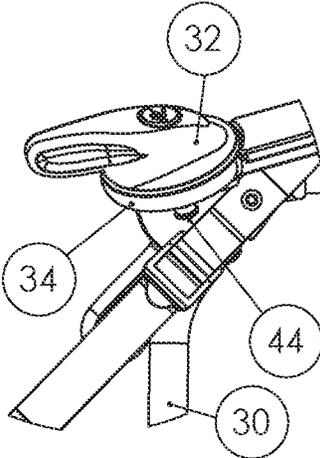


Figure 12 C

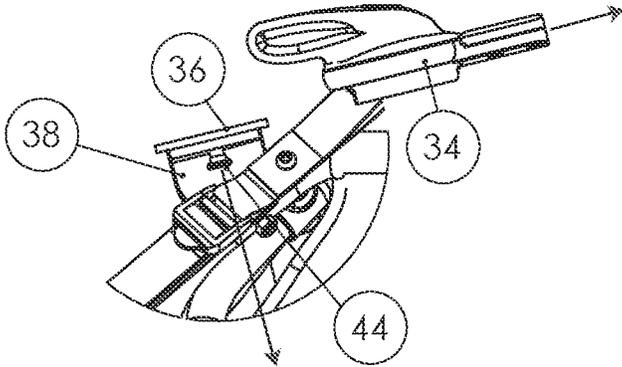


Figure 12 D

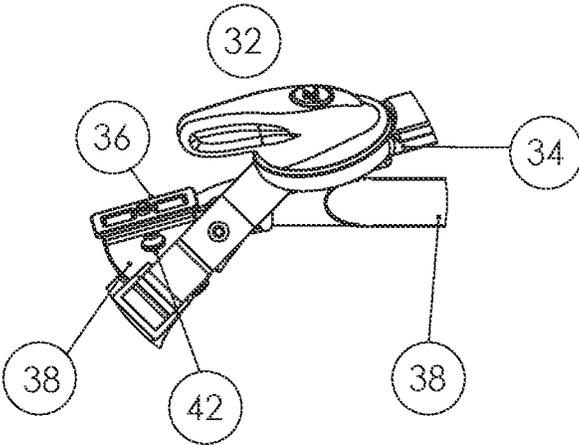


Figure 12 E

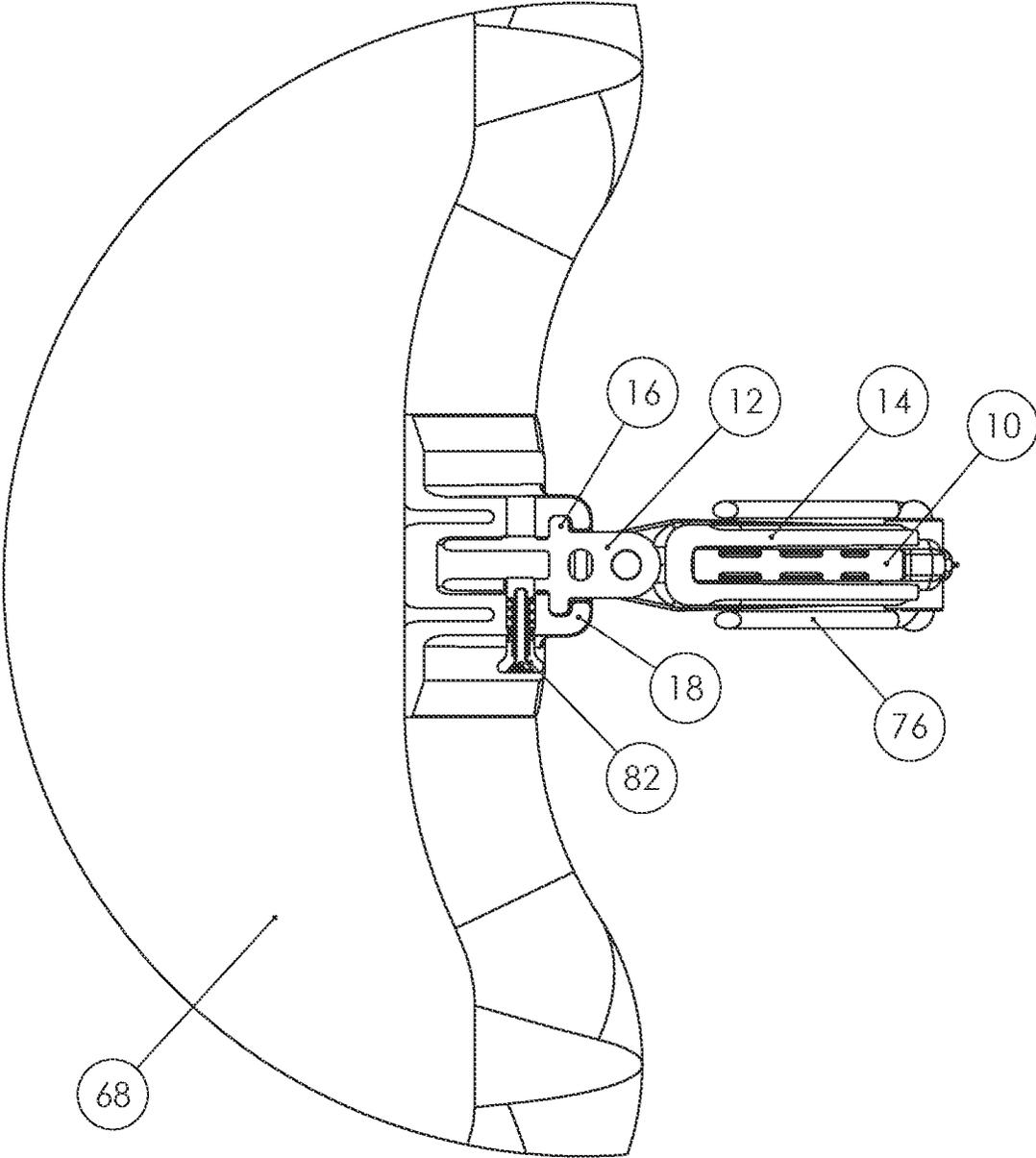


Figure 13

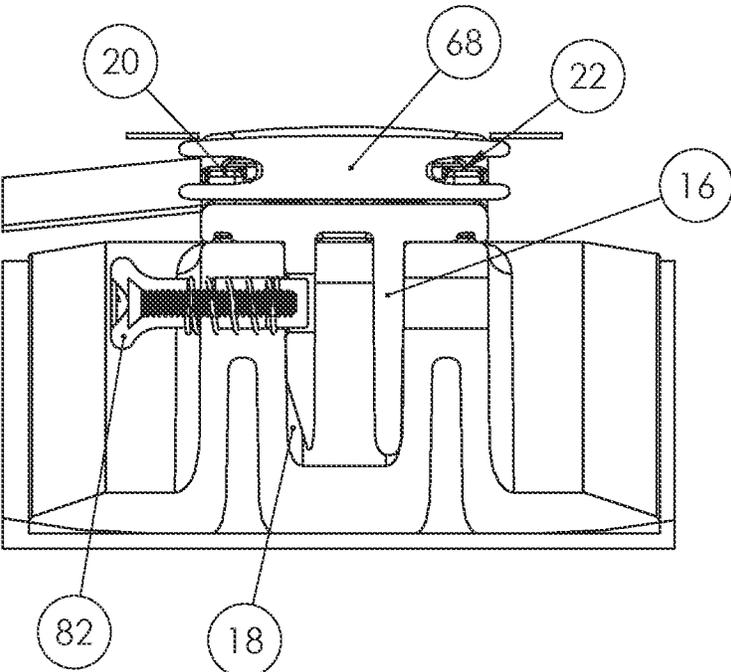


Figure 14

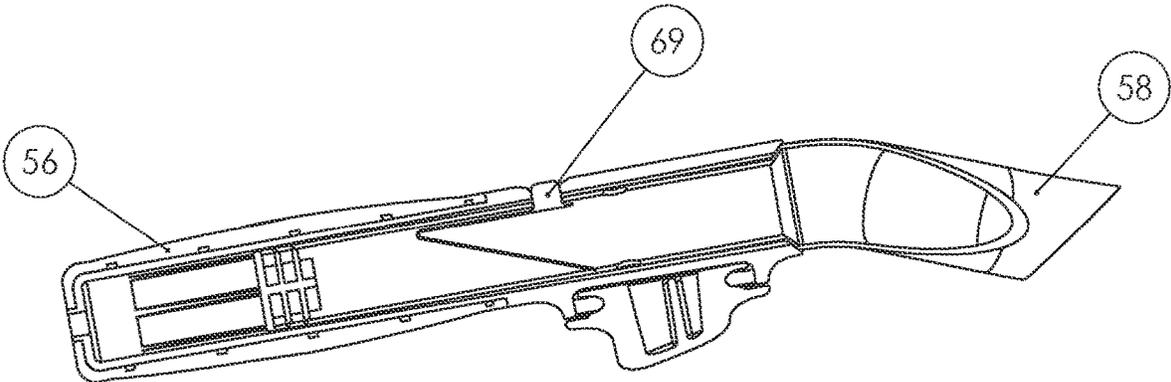


Figure 15

MODULAR RUDDER SYSTEM

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation application of and claims priority to U.S. application Ser. No. 17/719,296, filed Apr. 12, 2022, which is a continuation application of and claims priority to U.S. application Ser. No. 17/477,932, filed Sep. 17, 2021, now U.S. Pat. No. 11,305,858, which is a continuation application of and claims priority to U.S. application Ser. No. 16/948,128, filed Sep. 3, 2020, now U.S. Pat. No. 11,390,367, the entire contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0002] Watercraft such as kayaks, pedal boards and the like are normally steered by a rudder centrally positioned at the rear of the watercraft and pivot about a vertical axis. The rudder is steered using a steering handle which is either part of the rudder mechanism itself or is connected by cables to the rudder with the steering handle being located adjacent the operator of the watercraft who is normally positioned midway on the watercraft in a seated or standing position. Propulsion is provided by pedaling as disclosed, for example, in Ketterman, U.S. Pat. No. 6,022,249 and Czarowski, et. al. U.S. Pat. No. 9,475,559, the disclosures of which are expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0003] The rudder can also rotate about an axis transverse to the longitudinal dimension of the watercraft to be raised out of and lowered into the water, as described in the “Kayak Rudder” discussion posted to the Instructables.com do-it-yourself membership website’s Outside projects section by an unidentified member in 2015. A hyperlink to this article can be found in the Information Disclosure Statement filed herewith.

[0004] In the prior art, the steering handle and the rudder are typically mechanically joined or built into the watercraft and require tools and extensive manual manipulation for their removal.

[0005] We have developed a stand-alone modular system whereby both the steering mechanism and the rudder mechanism can be easily slipped off, and on the watercraft, which after system removal, allows for the simplified carrying and storage of the watercraft.

[0006] The system can also be transferred from one watercraft to another.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] A stand-alone modular removable rudder system for watercraft having a rudder comprising a steering handle coupled to a quick release mechanism adapted to releasably secure said steering handle to said watercraft in proximity to the operator, said system further comprising, a rudder mount adapted to be coupled to the rear of the watercraft by a quick release mechanism adapted to releasably secure said rudder mount to said watercraft, said rudder being carried by a rudder support pivotal about said rudder mount and cables operatively connecting said steering handle to said rudder mount whereby the steering handle can be operated to steer the rudder.

[0008] A stand-alone modular removable rudder system for watercraft having a rudder comprising a steering handle coupled to a quick release mechanism adapted to releasably

secure said steering handle to the watercraft in proximity to the operator, said system further comprising a rudder mount adapted to be coupled to the rear of the watercraft by a quick release mechanism adapted to releasably secure said rudder mount to said watercraft, said rudder being carried by a support pivotal about said rudder mount, and cables operatively connecting said steering handle to said rudder mount to pivot said rudder to steer, said rudder being rotatable on said rudder support about a transverse axis and a pull cord connected to said rudder support whereby the rudder can be rotated about said transverse axis and stowed on the deck of the watercraft.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] Turning to the drawings.

[0010] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of one preferred embodiment of the system of this invention showing a pedaled sit on kayak with the rudder prior to deployment and in the stowed position.

[0011] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the embodiment of FIG. 1 with the rudder attached rotated in the deployed position.

[0012] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of another embodiment of the system of this invention for a stand up pedaled board with the rudder prior to deployment and in the stowed position.

[0013] FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the embodiment of FIG. 3 with the rudder attached and rotated into the deployed position.

[0014] FIG. 5 is a top sectional away view of the system showing the connection of the cables to the steering handle and to the elements which pivot the rudder to steer, all common to both embodiments.

[0015] FIG. 6 is a partial side view with the rudder deployed and further showing the pull rope connection to the rudder support for rotating the rudder up and on to the deck from the deployed position.

[0016] FIG. 6A is a partial perspective view showing the rear of the watercraft with the rudder in the deployed position, the pull rope for raising and lowering the rudder and bungee cords which serve to limit the relatively free rotational movement of the rudder about the rudder mount while allowing the deployed rudder to rotate sufficiently upon striking an obstacle in the water to avoid damage.

[0017] FIG. 7 is a perspective view of the system embodiment of FIGS. 1 and 2 installed on a pedaled sit on kayak watercraft.

[0018] FIG. 8 is a perspective view of the system embodiment of FIGS. 3 and 4 installed on a stand up pedaled watercraft.

[0019] FIG. 9 is a partial side perspective view of the watercraft and rudder showing the retainer which is for attachment to the rear of the watercraft and the projection on the rudder mount in position to be releasably connected to the retainer and secured by a quick release pin.

[0020] FIG. 10A shows the view of FIG. 9 showing the direction of movement as the retainer and rudder mount are slipped together.

[0021] FIG. 10B shows the elements of FIGS. 9 and 10A slidably releasably connected.

[0022] FIG. 10C shows the elements of FIGS. 10A and 10B with the spring loaded quick release pin in place.

[0023] FIG. 10D is a detailed view of the spring loaded quick release pin shown in FIG. 10C.

[0024] FIG. 11 is a plan view showing the steering handle with quick release elements for releasable attachment to the handle bars of the stand-up pedal board embodiment of this invention as shown in FIG. 8.

[0025] FIG. 12A is a top view of the chair shown in the pedaled sit on kayak watercraft of FIG. 7 together with the retainer for the steering handle and its housing before it is affixed to the tubing of the chair.

[0026] FIG. 12B is a partial perspective view showing the direction of movement to attach the steering handle and its housing to the retainer with the retainer affixed to the tubing of the chair.

[0027] FIG. 12C shows the steering handle with housing releasably attached to the retainer when affixed to the tubing of the chair.

[0028] FIG. 12D shows the retainer with a slidable member received in a complementary slot formed in the bottom of the steering handle housing and release of the steering handle with housing from the retainer by pulling on the spring loaded quick release pin.

[0029] FIG. 12E shows the steering handle with housing released from the retainer by pulling the spring loaded release pin.

[0030] FIG. 13 is a partial top view with parts broken away to show the rudder mount connected to the retainer and the spring loaded quick release pin.

[0031] FIG. 14 is a view with parts broken away showing the quick release spring loaded release pin in place and extending into a hole in the retainer to secure the rudder mount to the retainer.

[0032] FIG. 15 is a sectional view of the handlebar grip showing the quick release spring button.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0033] One of the main advantages of the system is that it is a stand-alone, modular system which is capable of being quickly installed and removed from a variety of watercraft. This "quick-removal" feature is particularly important for inflatable craft that need to be deflated and folded up tightly as well as other watercraft where they are transported on the roof of a car and a rudder system makes this more difficult or dangerous. The rudder is raised and lowered using a single line that imparts a pivoting motion on the rudder blade and the weight of the blade carries it through to either a stowed or lowered position. The bungee keeps the rudder in either position. The overall rudder system of the invention comprises the quick release mechanisms for attaching the rudder and steering handle to the watercraft, the driving mechanism for the rudder which uses rotating quadrants, compression tubes and tensile cables and the integrated up/down feature using a single pull line.

[0034] The stand alone modular removable rudder system comprises a rudder 10, rudder mount 12, rudder support 14, a projection 16 on the rudder mount and rudder retainer 18 which provides a quick releasable connection of the rudder mount 12 and rudder 10 to the watercraft. These elements are operated by tensile cables 20 and 22 generally shown in FIG. 5. The tensile cables are normally contained in a compression tube 24.

[0035] The embodiment of the removable rudder systems of FIGS. 1, 2, 7 and 12A through 12E related to a pedaled sit on kayak 26 having a chair 28, shown in FIG. 7, for the

operator. The chair normally has a tubular frame 30. The steering handle 32 is rotatably mounted in steering handle housing 34.

[0036] The steering handle housing retainer 38 is affixed to the tubular frame 30 of the chair by a bolt inserted through hole 40. The underside of the housing 34 has a slot for releasably receiving member 36 formed on retainer 38.

[0037] The retainer 38 has a hole 42 which receives a spring loaded quick release pin 44 which enters a hole in the housing 34. By pulling pin 44, the retainer 38 is easily separated from housing 34.

[0038] The embodiment of FIGS. 1, 2, 7 and 12A through 12E is propelled by the operator operating pedals 46 which move the flaps 48 in an arcuate path across the longitudinal dimension of the kayak 26.

[0039] Turning to the stand-up pedal board 50 embodiment shown in FIGS. 3, 4, 8 and 11, the rotatable steering handle 32 is rotatable in housing 52. There is a hollow tubular retainer 54 integral with the housing 52, one end of which provides a hand grip 56 for the operator, the opposite end 58 is adapted to snugly receive one free end of the handle bar 60 carried by upright 62, FIG. 11.

[0040] The stand-up embodiment is propelled by the operator stepping up and down on pedals 64 to operate flaps 48, FIG. 8.

[0041] The free-standing system of this invention can be quickly and readily released simply by pressing the quick release spring button 69 and pulling hollow tubular retainer 54 carrying housing 52 and steering handle 32 from the handlebar 60. In the case of the stand-up embodiment, the free end of the handlebar 60 serves as the retainer for the steering handle and its housing.

[0042] In both the sit down and stand up embodiments, the pedals and operator are positioned somewhat midway on the watercraft at the usual distance forward of the rudder.

[0043] Referring to the rudder 10 and its quick release, the rudder is carried at the rear end or transom 66 of the kayak, pedal board or other watercraft.

[0044] The rudder support 14 along with the rudder 10 is pivoted side to side to steer on vertical shaft 70 carried by rudder mount 12 by the operation of tensile cables 20 and 22 using the steering handle.

[0045] The rudder 10 can also be rotated about transverse shaft 72 in rudder support 14 by means of pull rope 74 to raise and lower. The pull rope 74 imparts a pivoting motion to rudder support 14 and rudder 10 about shaft 72. The weight of the rudder 10 carries it through either the stowed or deployed position. The bungee cord 76 keeps the blade in either position, while allowing the rudder to rotate somewhat freely to the rear when striking an obstacle in the water and avoiding rudder damage.

[0046] The quick release of the rudder is shown in FIGS. 9, 10A through 10D, 13 and 14. The retainer 18 is affixed to the rear of the watercraft. The retainer 18 has a hole 78. The rudder mount 12 also has a hole 80. When projection 16 on the rudder mount is received in the retainer 18, holes 78 and 80 align and a quick release pin 82 can be inserted. The release pin is spring loaded as shown in FIGS. 13 and 14. The entire rudder mechanism is easily and quickly released by operation of the quick release pin 82.

[0047] In use, the retainers 18 and 38 can be mechanically attached to the rear surface of the watercraft and the chair tubing, respectively. These elements need not be removeable as they do not interfere with the transport and storage of the

watercraft. The handlebar and its upright and the chair can be removed from the watercraft and transported and stored separately.

[0048] The quick release elements projection **16**, slidable member **36** and hollow tubular member **54** are elements of the quick release mechanism of the system of this invention and complement the retainers or handlebar to complete the quick release function.

1-7. (canceled)

8. A watercraft comprising:

a deck;

a rudder mechanism rotatably coupled to the watercraft; a shaft defining an axis about which the rudder mechanism is rotatable;

a retainer fixed to the watercraft and positioned forward of the rudder mechanism;

a steering handle device releasably secured to the retainer; and

a cable connecting the rudder mechanism to the steering handle device,

wherein the steering handle device comprises a rotatable handle operable to drive the cable to rotate the rudder mechanism about the axis.

9. The watercraft of claim **8**, wherein:

the cable comprises a portion extending from a rear portion of the steering handle device to the rudder mechanism, the portion of the cable being positioned above the deck.

10. The watercraft of claim **8**, wherein:

the axis is a first axis; and

the rudder mechanism comprises:

a rudder support member, and

a rudder pivotably mounted to the rudder support member, wherein the rudder is pivotable about a second axis relative to the rudder support member.

11. The watercraft of claim **10**, wherein:

the rudder is pivotable about the second axis relative to the rudder support member from a deployed position to a stowed position, wherein in the stowed position, the rudder extends forward from the rudder support member along an upper surface of a rear portion of the deck, and wherein in the deployed position, the rudder extends downward from the rudder support member.

12. The watercraft of claim **8**, wherein the steering handle device comprises:

a housing releasably secured to the retainer, wherein the rotatable handle of the steering handle device is rotatable relative to the housing to drive the cable to rotate the rudder mechanism about the axis.

13. The watercraft of claim **12**, wherein:

the rotatable handle projects radially outwardly from the housing of the steering handle device.

14. The watercraft of claim **13**, wherein:

the housing comprises a portion where the cable is attached to the rotatable handle, the portion of the housing having a circular cross-section.

15. The watercraft of claim **12**, wherein:

the cable is a first cable;

the watercraft comprises a second cable connecting the steering handle device to the rudder mechanism; and the steering handle device comprises one or more slots at least partially defined by the rotatable handle and along which the first cable and the second cable are routed to attach to the rotatable handle.

16. The watercraft of claim **8**, further comprising:

a releasable coupling mechanism for releasably securing the steering handle device to the retainer, the releasable coupling mechanism comprising:

a first portion on the retainer, and

a second portion on the steering handle device, the second portion configured to engage the first portion of the retainer to releasably secure the steering handle device to the retainer.

17. The watercraft of claim **16**, wherein:

one of the first portion or the second portion is a slot, and the other of the first portion or the second portion is a receiving member to be received in the slot to releasably secure the steering handle device to the retainer.

18. The watercraft of claim **16**, wherein the second portion of the releasable coupling mechanism is on a lower portion of the steering handle device, and the rotatable handle of the steering handle device is on an upper portion of the steering handle device.

19. The watercraft of claim **16**, wherein the steering handle device is slidable relative to the retainer to couple the second portion of the releasable coupling mechanism on the steering handle device with the first portion of the releasable coupling mechanism on the retainer.

20. The watercraft of claim **8**, wherein the watercraft is a pedal-driven kayak.

21. The watercraft of claim **8**, wherein the retainer is fixed above the deck of the watercraft.

22. The watercraft of claim **8**, further comprising a chair on the deck of the watercraft, wherein the retainer is positioned proximate to the chair.

23. A steering assembly for a watercraft, the steering assembly comprising:

a rudder mechanism configured to be rotatably coupled to the watercraft;

a shaft defining an axis about which the rudder mechanism is rotatable;

a steering handle device configured to be releasably secured to a retainer of the watercraft forward of the rudder mechanism; and

a cable connecting the rudder mechanism to the steering handle device,

wherein the steering handle device comprises a rotatable handle operable to drive the cable to rotate the rudder mechanism about the axis.

24. The steering assembly of claim **23**, wherein:

the axis is a first axis; and

the rudder mechanism comprises:

a rudder support member, and

a rudder pivotably mounted to the rudder support member, wherein the rudder is pivotable about a second axis relative to the rudder support member from a deployed position to a stowed position, wherein in the stowed position, the rudder extends forward from the rudder support member along an upper surface of a rear portion of a deck of the watercraft, and wherein in the deployed position, the rudder extends downward from the rudder support member.

25. The steering assembly of claim **23**, wherein the steering handle device comprises:

a housing comprising a portion where the cable is attached to the rotatable handle, the portion of the housing having a circular cross-section,

wherein the housing is releasably secured to the retainer, wherein the rotatable handle of the steering handle device is rotatable relative to the housing to drive the cable to rotate the rudder mechanism about the axis, and wherein the rotatable handle projects radially outwardly from the housing of the steering handle device.

26. The steering assembly of claim **23**, wherein the steering handle device comprises:

a coupling member of a releasable coupling mechanism for releasably securing the steering handle device to the retainer, the coupling member of the steering assembly configured to engage a corresponding coupling member of the retainer to releasably secure the steering handle device to the retainer.

27. The steering assembly of claim **26**, wherein:

the coupling member of the steering handle device comprises a slot configured to receive a receiving member of the corresponding coupling member of the retainer.

28. The steering assembly of claim **26**, wherein the coupling member of the steering handle device is on a lower portion of the steering handle device, and the rotatable handle of the steering handle device is on an upper portion of the steering handle device.

29. The steering assembly of claim **26**, wherein the steering handle device is slidable relative to the retainer to couple the coupling member of the steering handle device with the corresponding coupling member of the retainer.

* * * * *